

Jewish Theological Seminary of America, The- Flagship rabbinical seminary of the Conservative movement.

The original Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTSA or JTS) was founded by Sabato Morais in 1886, and began offering courses in January of 1887 in the vestry of the Spanish-Portuguese synagogue, New York City's oldest Jewish congregation. The institution was intended as a traditional rabbinical program, designed to offer an alternative to the students at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. The JTS Association promised to remain, "Faithful to Mosaic Law and ancestral traditions". Unfortunately, the Seminary had to bear financial difficulties by the turn of the century. A group of wealthy Jewish philanthropists, led by Louis Marshall (1856-1929) and Jacob Schiff (1847-1920), most of whom lived in New York City and belonged to Reform congregations, stepped forward to offer funding. They believed that it was important to create an institution to train Americanized rabbis who could serve the huge numbers of Eastern European immigrants who had settled into Jewish ghettos.

The reconstituted seminary was able to recruit the prominent Geniza scholar Solomon Schechter (1847-1915) from Cambridge University in 1902. Schechter built an impressive academic and religious institution on Lexington Avenue between 58th and 59th Street. Many of the students studied in the morning at the College of the City of New York, while others studied at Columbia University, the University of Pennsylvania, or Harvard.

Cyrus Adler succeeded Schechter as president in 1916. Adler moved JTS to Broadway, between 122nd and 123rd Street on Morningside Heights, opposite Columbia

University. He also established what was then called the Museum of Jewish Ceremonial Objects. This institution was later renamed the Jewish Museum, and moved into Felix Warburg's mansion on 5th Avenue. Louis Finkelstein succeeded Adler in 1940. Finkelstein initiated the establishment of the University of Judaism which became the West Coast branch of JTS, later becoming an independent institution. In 1972, Gerson Cohen became president. It was during the Cohen years that the institution dealt with the controversial question of whether to ordain women rabbis. Ismar Schorsch now serves as president and Chancellor of the faculties. In addition to a rabbinical school, JTS has a cantorial school, undergraduate and graduate schools, and several research centers and special programs. JTS is one of the most important Jewish cultural and religious institutions anywhere in the world.